



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

250

F. E. Chase

6/10/95

·

BEHIND THE SCENES
· OF THE COMÉDIE FRANCAISE. /

·

· · ·

·

·



Rachel as Phaedra

BEHIND THE SCENES
OF
THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

AND OTHER RECOLLECTIONS

BY
ARSENÉ HOUSSAYE

TRANSLATED AND EDITED, WITH NOTES

BY
ALBERT D. VANDAM

AUTHOR OF "FAMOUS BOHEMIANS," "GENIUS EN NÉGLIGÉ," ETC

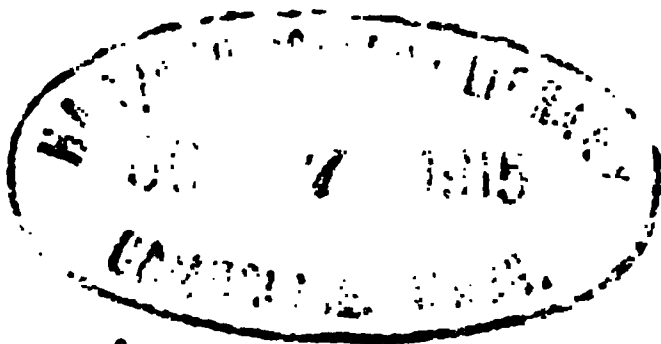
PHILADELPHIA: GEBBIE AND CO.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL LIMITED

1889

FL 398, 39

~~647.24.5~~



*

F. E. Chace.
Boston.

WESTMINSTER
PRINTED BY NICHOLS AND SONS,
25, PARLIAMENT STREET.

LIST OF PHOTOGRAVURE ILLUSTRATIONS.

RACHEL AS PHAEDRE	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
FRANÇOIS J. P. REGNIER	PAGE 16
JOSEPH I. SAMSON	“ 64
AUGUSTINE BROHAN	“ 112
MARIE FAVART	“ 160
EDMOND GEFFROY	“ 208
FRANÇOIS J. E. GOT	“ 240
LOUIS ARSÈNE DELAUNAY	“ 288
FLEURY P. MAUBANT	“ 320
MADELEINE BROHAN	“ 368
JEAN B. P. BRESSANT	“ 416
JULIE C. LA JOUASSAIN	“ 464

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

What the Revolution of '48 did for literary journalism— M. Arsène Houssaye as a literary free-lance — The decline of the Comédie Française—M. Houssaye sum- moned to the Elysée — Rachel presents him to the Prince-President—M. Houssaye is offered the director- ship of the Comédie Française—He accepts—Insurrec- tion of the <i>sociétaires</i> —They appeal to the Minister— Rachel to the rescue	1
--	---

CHAPTER II.

Rachel offers Houssaye to make a tour round the world and to play his tragedy, <i>Sapho</i> —The cabal at the Comédie continues—M. Houssaye appointed in spite of the opposition—M. Houssaye and Rachel refused the privilege of the free-list—They pay for their seats— An evening at the Comédie in '49—M. Houssaye's re- ception by the comedians	16
--	----

CHAPTER III.

Rival directors—M. Houssaye remains master of the field —A playwright of the old school and a director of the new—A visit from Alfred de Musset—A visit from Augustine Brohan—Mdlles. Anais and Denain—MM. Provost, etc.—Victor Hugo and Rachel—The <i>sociétaires</i> threaten to leave the Comédie—M. Houssaye prepares a countermove—Contemplated engagements of Frédérick Lemaître and Bocage—Offenbach—Rachel's reappear- ance	37
---	----

CHAPTER IV.

	PAGE
Innovations—A faithful henchman—Count d'Orsay—De Morny—The life of a director of the Comédie Française—The Prince-President and his <i>entourage</i> at the Elysée	65

CHAPTER V.

Renewed attempts to oust M. Houssaye—Rachel, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo to the rescue	97
---	----

CHAPTER VI.

Bird's-eye view of the French stage in the nineteenth century	106
---	-----

CHAPTER VII.

Reforms needed at the Comédie Française—The part a director should play—The company of the Comédie Française in 1850	137
--	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

The director's four secretaries—Their functions—The actress-mother—The Reading Committee—A play by M. Mazères—Some members of the staff of the Comédie Française	149
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

The trials and tribulations of a director—Emile Augier—A love play off the stage by Augustine Brohan and Alfred de Musset	170
---	-----

CHAPTER X.

A bundle of letters	196
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

	PAGE
A retrospect—Ponsard and <i>Charlotte Corday</i> —Opposition to the piece—Victor Hugo interferes—A revival of Molière	208

CHAPTER XII.

More intrigues—Victor Hugo and <i>Angelo</i> —Rachel in London—The censorship—Balzac as a playwright .	234
--	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

Madeleine Brohan—Her <i>débuts</i> —Old and new plays .	257
---	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

Jules Sandeau's <i>Mdlle. de la Seiglière</i> —The sources of M. Sardou's <i>Theodora</i> —Jules Lacroix and the late Mr. Watts Phillips' plays on the same subject—The Comédie Française in 1851—The <i>Coup d'État</i> in its effect on the Comédie Française—The censorship and the memory of Louis XIV.—De La Chaume—Vacher, the chief of the <i>claque</i> ; his functions; their philosophy—The green-room of the Comédie Française	281
---	-----

CHAPTER XV.

The <i>Coup de État</i> —Count (afterwards Duke) de Morny—Official interference with the Comédie Française—A <i>mot</i> of Casimir Delavigne—The whole of Marivaux should be in the modern repertory	297
--	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

The Comédie Française in 1852—Its debts—Napoleon III. and de Morny continue the traditions of Napoleon I.—	
--	--

	PAGE
Reorganisation of the orchestra—Rachel—Side-lights of theatrical life—Rachel and Pradier—The censorship and Napoleon III.—First nights—Gounod—The Muse of history	317

CHAPTER XVII.

The Comédie Française in 1853—Rachel in Mme. de Girardin's <i>Lady Tartuffe</i> —Rachel—Achille Fould—Napoleon III. and the Comédie Française—Balzac's <i>Lys de la Vallée</i> on the stage—Two suppers at Rachel's .	358
---	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Comédie Française in 1854—Bressant—Alfred de Musset—Bache—A heaven-born tragic actress—Rachel	409
---	-----

CHAPTER XIX.

The Comédie Française in 1855—Alfred de Musset at the Tuileries—Baron James de Rothschild—The work of a director of the Comédie Française	456
---	-----

CHAPTER XX.

The Comédie Française in 1856—Comedies with a purpose—Georges Sand—The beginning of the end—M. Houssaye resigns—Another director appointed—Retrospect	483
---	-----

CHAPTER XXI.

Random recollections	506
--------------------------------	-----

BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE.

CHAPTER I.

THE Revolution of 1848, so profitable to briefless and other barristers, was disastrous to authors and artists. That small republic starved in the midst of the bigger one. Towards the month of June I had not a penny left. I had sold my last share in the Bank of France for five hundred francs. The price of copy in the newspapers was simply ridiculous. Girardin coolly spoke of a penny (English) a line. Doctor Véron (*Constitutionnel*), who had increased the width of his columns by half, had cut down his prices in the same proportion. One day that I was twitting him with splitting his five-franc pieces in twain he replied, "Come and dine with me every day." But could I shut up the house like that, seeing that I had more friends than ever to come and take pot-luck? That period of the Revolution was "hard times" indeed. I was part proprietor of the *Artiste*, and my property was tantamount to

a white elephant. Fortunately I had still some pictures left. I sold a Boucher, a Prud'hon, and a Diaz to an English painter, Anderson, who gave me ten thousand francs for them. I might have got through the season, but I went back to the Bourse, where I gambled so badly—or so well—as to quickly lose the ten thousand francs, besides several others. Though I was by no means a born gambler, I began to fancy that I'd "come a cropper" at last. I became afraid, and swore to set foot no more in the Greek temple. It will be seen how I kept my oath.

A son had been born to me while the Revolution was at its height. It was the blessing on home and hearth when the former was tumbling to ruin, but the mother had eyes only for her son, and, for that matter, the father also. Much against my will I took my wife and child to the country. My father, though the Revolution had in no way affected him, would not have given me five hundred francs to save my life; but his home, thanks be to God! was always open to me. We were welcomed with open arms, and he said very nicely, "You had better stop with us also." In those days, however, there was but one city for me to live in, excited as I was by both the political and literary fevers. Hence I only remained for a few days at Bruyères, telling them that I had many strings to my bow, and was not in the least afraid of the future, which, after all, was true.

As it was, I had already gone through a great deal. My father was a millionaire, but his curse was the only thing he had given me at my start in the world. I had given up soldiering for poetizing: the latter trade had brought me little more than the former. Nevertheless, after my Bohemian existence, I had had several slices of luck, for it appears to have been written on high that I should come in contact with all things, from gilded misery to palaces built on sand, with castles conjured up by the fumes of champagne for a background or horizon.

When I got back to Paris, I manfully resumed work. At one and the same time I published "Chamfort" in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, "The Republic of Plato" in the *Artiste*, "Sketches of Celebrated Actresses" in the *Constitutionnel*, and "Hands full of Roses and Blood," in Alphonse Karr's paper, which at that time bore no other title than *The Journal*; Charpentier was bringing out my *Portraits of the Eighteenth Century*. In a word, in order to forget my bad luck at the Bourse I worked from morn till night, passing from the game of money to the game of mind. I had sent away my cook, and I took a hurried lunch at the Café d'Orsay, where I was always sure to meet with friends—among others Gleyre and Ziem.* I dined here, there, and everywhere, oftenest at the Café

* Painters of eminence, some of whose canvasses are at present in the Louvre.—[Transl.]

de Paris, in company of Roqueplan, La Chaise, Gilbert de Voisins, Daugny, Beauvoir, Heeckeren, Malitourne, and Véron. The latter, "doing the grand," frequently paid the bill for his contributors, for he did not like sad faces around him.

My acquaintance with Doctor Véron dated from the metamorphosis of the *Constitutionnel* in 1844. He had sent for me and de Musset (Alfred) at the same time, in order to fill the intervals of the *Wandering Jew*. It was like his confounded theatrical impudence, for he still believed himself to be the director of the Opera. Nevertheless it was no use disguising the matter: Sue's was the big piece, we were nothing but so many ballets. I had published my stories of actresses in the *Constitutionnel*. Doctor Véron's appreciation of me was based above all upon my commerce with those ladies. He was very fond of women—but as seen from the wings. He valued the moralists who studied the everlasting womanly (*das ewig Weibliche* of Goethe) in the actress. I owed him a debt of gratitude, because in the days when I had not a penny wherewith to bless myself he had come to me. "How much an article do you want?" "A hundred francs; that's what Girardin pays me." "Very well, I'll give you two hundred." But how he had come down since the 24th of February!

My wife came back to Paris, and I felt in despair at no longer being able to give her the superfluous

— the superfluous, that daily bread of woman. The further I perceived, the clearer I perceived the abyss, for I could not break with my magnificent habit of spending without reckoning.

It was at that time that Rachel, that tragic figure, came into my existence like a smiling image of Fate.

* * * * *

The Comédie Française was at its seventh year of lean kine when one evening a mysterious individual, dressed from head to foot in black, called at my house and bade me accompany him to the Elysée. The Elysée was certainly not the Prefecture of Police, but, seeing that I was the friend of Thoré and Sobrier, seeing that I had saved Esquiros from being tried by court-martial, I had a notion that I was wanted by the gentlemen of the political detective police. "Who wants me, and why am I wanted?" I asked. "I don't know," replied the man in black. And to all my questions he vouchsafed the same answer, "I don't know."

I was very busy putting up a piece of Gobelins in my study. It was all that was left to me of my very transitory splendour. I had been living in the apartment of M. de Voltaire, but an uncle, by making a new will shortly before his death, had at one fell swoop despoiled me of a million and a-half of francs. It was the Parthian shot, after which he turned his face to the wall and died.

I put a few more nails into my tapestry, after which I went into my wife's room. When I told her of the man in black she began to cry, and caught her child to her breast. "Don't cry," I said; "if they wanted to arrest me they would not take the roundabout way of sending to the Elysée for me." Nevertheless as I kissed the mother and child I felt rather uneasy myself. I had not conspired against the Republic, but I frequented a circle which only cared for Napoleon on the battle-field.

When I joined my man I was in black myself. A private carriage was waiting at the door.

When I got to the Elysée I was ushered into one room, then into a second, then into a third. In the latter Mdlle. Rachel, smiling all over her face, came towards me. She appeared to be quite at home. But was not she at home everywhere? Besides, at that time she was "the mistress" of the house.

I still failed to understand the meaning of all this, but the preface was not a long one.

"Would you like to be director of the Comédie Française?" she asked me point-blank.

"I didn't know you had a grudge against me," I replied.

"You know that a *tragédienne* has always got wrongs to avenge."

"Well, take your revenge then. I am prepared for any and every thing while you are with

me. Besides, it will amuse me to be President of the Republic of the House of Molière, seeing that I cannot be President of the Republic at the Elysée."

The world is divided into actors and spectators. The latter are no doubt the happier of the two, because they have merely to be passive; still, I preferred passing at once among the former, less for the pleasure of "taking the stage" myself than for the sake of knowing the "behind the scenes" of life. I must have been plentifully endowed with illusions to have been able to keep some until the very end. While we were talking, a few personages that had been something in the past and others who were to be something in the future went in and out, after which I was presented to Prince Louis Napoleon. He paid me a compliment about one of my books—I do not remember which—he had read while in prison; and then with his bass voice, so strongly contrasting with his dreamy looks, he expressed his firm determination to restore to the Théâtre Français all its splendour—and all its tragedies.

He thoroughly knew the constitution of the Théâtre Français, and would not as much as by a hair's breadth alter the "Decree of Moscow.* To him the decree was tantamount to the Holy Ark, but he wanted a despotic republic to succeed the parliamentary one at the institution.

* The decree sent by Napoleon I. by which the Comédie Française is still mainly governed.—[Transl.]

M. de Persigny asked me whether I was prepared to hold my own with the actors-in-ordinary of the king, who no longer wanted a king, and who debated in so admirable a parliamentary fashion during the whole of the day as to have no "go" left in them for the evening—who so capitally managed their house as to find the receipts dwindle down to tragic or comic amounts—according to the view one took of them.

On one occasion said receipts had come down to the magnificent sum of fifty-three francs. That was in the summer. "But now that we had got to the autumn," added Major Fleury, "they go up to a hundred and fifty-three francs."

The Prince's dull eyes lighted up. "It appears *commandant*, that you go behind the scenes."

"Even so, monseigneur; one is bound to face all kinds of battles."

I replied that I could not have been sent for at a more propitious moment, and thanked the President for having thought of me.

"You owe me no thanks," said the Prince, "they are due to Mdlle. Rachel. The names of ten men of letters were placed before her: she chose yours. I do not know why."

I bowed to Mdlle. Rachel.

"Do you know why I chose you?" she said. "It is because I know less of you than of the others."

I had met Mdlle. Rachel twice or thrice at Count

Walewski's, at Count Obreskoff's, at Doctor Véron's, but I was not counted among her intimate friends. Like most women she liked the unknown. She had, however, once asked me for a drama on the antique pattern on the subject of Sappho. But whom had she *not* asked for a tragedy?

The Prince, while talking about the masterpieces of Corneille and Racine, spoke also of modern work. It was his wish that Mdlle. Rachel should interpret Hugo, de Vigny, Dumas, de Musset, and others. Mdlle. Rachel promised to study at once *Angelo* and *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle*, as a matter of giving hostages to the modern school. Besides, she herself was anxious to try a fall in the interpretation of her contemporaries.

I went away with her, pleased with everybody, even with myself, but above all with the illustrious actress. She made me get into her carriage, and drove me back to the Rue du Bac, telling me not to forget that I was to dine with her on the morrow to talk over the repertory.

But when the morrow came I was already no longer director of the Théâtre Français.

This is what had happened. At the first news, which came from Rachel — for I had not said a word — the Comedians met and “elected themselves” into a watch committee — to guard the public interest. They took an oath on the plaster busts of Talma and Mdlle. Mars that they would have a master no more. Their enthusiasm pro-

duced a thrill in the portrait of Molière. They threw themselves into six hackney cabs and went to the Minister of the Interior. To look at them in their evening dress and white ties one would have taken them to belong to a third-class funeral. And in fact they meant nothing less than my obsequies.

The Minister always receives the Comedians, even on days when he receives no one. He is perfectly right. Those who amused him from behind the footlights must be more amusing still in private life, when nature drops the mask. It will not do, though, to make too sure of this, because the actor is always acting, even before his looking-glass. It is the history of the coquettish woman over again.

The then Minister's name was Ferdinand Barrot, a clever man of the world, all the cleverer for his assumption of good-natured simplicity. But this time the Comedians were cleverer than he was; they played their game so carefully that he was taken in by their lamentations. They proved to him that it was in the highest degree impolitic to meddle with their republic. "It would alarm people with regard to the designs of the Prince; people would not fail to accuse him of beginning with the Théâtre Français in order to finish with France; the papers would be sure to say in every key that the two republics would cease to exist before long."

Though the Minister had received orders to coun-

tersign my nomination, he reassured the Comedians, and promised to defend their cause with the President. He had not a moment's doubt that the Prince, who was very fond of them, would leave them full liberty of action.

All this was narrated by a paper which concluded its article in the following words:

“And that is why M. Arsène Houssaye was director of the Théâtre Français for five minutes.”

I was at Rachel's when the paper containing the article was brought in. We had sat down to dinner in company with Rebecca (one of Rachel's sisters), and were as jolly as possible, when all of a sudden Rachel smashed her glass.

“Why this bit of tragedy?”

“Read,” she said, handing me the paper.

“There is no occasion to break your glass.”

“Don't you know that it brings good and bad luck at the same time? Good luck to one's self, bad luck to others.”

At the same moment Rebecca, reaching across the table for the paper, upset the salt.

“That's more serious,” I said.

We all three took some salt to throw it over our shoulders.

“Yes,” said Rachel, “this means a cataclysm. Wait for me here. I'll take my carriage and get the news.”

Her carriage always came for her at eight. It was at the door then. But she had scarcely crossed

the threshold when a Talleyrand in *embryo*, a genuine diplomatist, who was afterwards Ambassador at St. Petersburg, came up.

“Well,” she said to him, “are they trying to make fools of us?”

“No, the Prince is very vexed at all this, but it appears that it is easier to enter the Tuileries, booted and spurred and riding-whip in hand, than to effect an entrance to the house of Molière. We are meeting with obstacles not to be overcome.”

The diplomatist and Rachel had by this time got as far as the dining-room, where a consultation was held in company with Rebecca and another comer, Mme. de Sennerville, a kind of “swell show-woman,” well in with journalists, actresses, ministers, well in with everybody, a strange character if ever there was one, and often sketched by Daumier and Gavarni.

“After all,” said the diplomatist on entering, “I am the bearer of golden words on a silver platter.”

“Speak,” said Rachel in a tone of feverish anxiety.

“Well then, the Citizen-Comedians in Ordinary of the King, the Citizen-Comedians of the Republic, in consideration of your having sung the *Marseillaise* with a flag that showed more red than tricolour, because you managed so well to hide the blue and the white”

“On my heart,” interrupted Rachel, kissing the ambassador.

"The citizens aforenamed offer you an engagement for five years."

Rachel's features assumed an expression of sovereign disdain. "And how much do these gentlemen deign to offer little Rachel to get them out of their misery."

"They have left the amount open."

"You surprise me," said Rachel in a tragical-comic tone.

A smile played on the diplomatist's lips. "Yes, the amount has been left open because they depend on your disinterestedness; but it has been agreed behind the wings that should you require more than thirty thousand francs the contract will not be signed."

"That's what I expected. No doubt they'll give me an extra ten francs 'for fire and light' when I act." *

* The French expression is *feux* only, and has its origin in the following custom. Under Louis XIV. the singers and instrumentalists of the king's orchestra received, in addition to their appointments, bread, wine, and various other food, on the occasion of the six principal feasts of the Church. These meals were partaken of in the palace. But on the feasts of St. Louis and St. Martin, seeing that they might fall on a Friday, the meat was replaced by a donation in money. In 1700 the bread and wine were also definitely converted into an equivalent sum, proportionate to the talent and position of the recipients, and became a genuine *douceur*. Towards the end of the eighteenth century this supplementary salary, which amounted in many cases to sixty francs per day, was applied to the purchase of wax-candles, which the principal artists preferred in their dressing-rooms to the ordinary tallow-candles supplied by the management. It was then only that the expression "bread

“Surely they will. Equality and fraternity is their motto. Seeing that they get no more than ten francs when they play one act, why should you get more because you happen to be playing five. You are killing yourself for the public, true enough, but they say that it is not for them.”

Rachel had taken a seat by my side. “You’ll begin by taking your coffee with us, even if you have already taken yours at the Elysée,” she said to the future ambassador; “after which you’ll take back on your silver platter your words of gold. That kind of business is not quite good enough for me.” And remembering an epigram of a fellow-actress with regard to her, she added: “I am not a Jewess but a Jew when I discuss money matters.” *

Never had the great actress libelled herself more than when saying this. I am too fond of the truth to shrink from demolishing a generally-accepted idea. Mdlle. Rachel was lavish with everything—with her talent, with her health, with her money. She never did anything but give. Never did want, however hidden, appeal in vain to her. She ended by giving her life: she died in harness to give to her children. Had she been a Jew (in the acceptation of Mdlle. Judith’s meaning) she would have left millions. She only left a com-
and wine” was changed to “fires,” which exists up to the present day.—[Transl.]

* Mdlle. Judith had said: “Mdlle. Rachel is not a Jewess, she is a Jew.”

paratively small fortune ; she would have left none at all but for her father, who at last took the management of her affairs in his own hands. It is not generally known, nowadays, how much she earned in her halcyon days at the Théâtre Français—thirty-six thousand francs per annum—about as much as Patti earns in one evening. Truly, I gave her five hundred francs a night for “fires,” but what was it after all ? Just sufficient to give a dinner next day to her theatrical and journalistic cronies, or more often to give away in charity to a poor woman who suffered in secret. I have seen Rachel at work, and much will be forgiven to her, for she gave much.

“Is this your *ultimatum* ?” asked the ambassador in extraordinary of the Prince, an hour afterwards.

“Yes,” replied the actress ; “tell your master that if he means to govern France as they govern the house of Corneille, he’ll not be long at the Elysée.”

“Don’t worry yourself about that ; if he doesn’t remain at the Elysée it’s because he’ll move to the Tuileries.”

CHAPTER II.

WHEN the ambassador was gone, Rachel invited me to make a small tour round the world with her. The moment they no longer enacted tragedies in France there ceased to be a France, according to her. She wanted to go to America, return to England once more, push as far as Russia—in one word, to attempt all sorts of adventurous things. I admit that with my love for the romantic I was almost tempted to book a seat on the car of Thespis. “Be this as it may,” she said; “I do not wish you to have wasted even so much as a day; you are going to write me a tragedy and I’ll play it, in no matter what theatre. We have already spoken of a *Sappho*; well, to work, to work.” We separated like friends for ever and aye, and before I went to bed I had written the first hundred lines of *Sappho*. That grandiose love passion, ascending, ascending, ascending, until death, was to be embodied into three acts.

“After all,” said I to myself, “I prefer being acted myself by Rachel than to make her act the work of others.” So for the next few days I worked hard at my tragedy.



Francis J. P. Rogers

The very next morning I got a note from Rachel, saying, "There is something new in the wind, I'll come and tell you." But seeing that I do not like being a constant candidate, I did not trouble much about it. A few days later I met her at dinner at Doctor Véron's, who had founded at the *Constitutionnel*, or rather at his own house, a power by the side of the other powers. It was so to speak the ante-chamber of the future Empire.

It was especially Mdlle. Rachel who said the best things that night. When she was "in good form" there was a delightful "go" about her; it was a running stream of pearls, and hard but glistening pebbles; for her wit was many-sided—at times very cutting and brutal, at others very delicate. Mdlle. Rachel presided, in company with her handsome friend, Mdlle. Rhea—a living marble, dragged into the tomb of oblivion afterwards by a Russian prince. Among the guests were Roqueplan, Boilay, Malitourne, Cassagnac, Sainte-Beuve.

They were talking about a *coup d'état* at the Théâtre Français. It was Roqueplan who proposed this other 18th of Brumaire. According to him they ought to throw the whole lot there and then out of the windows.

"Where are the grenadiers?" I asked.

"We are the grenadiers, all of us," said Véron, pointing to the journalists. "You wait till tomorrow and see whether we are well armed or not."

“The grenadiers,” I retorted, looking towards Mdlle. Rachel and Mdlle. Rhea, “here they are, the grenadiers, armed to the teeth.”

“Yes,” chimed Roqueplan, “for a *coup d'état* Mdlle. Rachel is the first grenadier of France.”*

These and other sallies were the order of the evening. Nevertheless Véron and his band of journalists kept their word. For the next few days there was a running fire against the Comedians, “who would have no more” of Mdlle. Rachel. Their sittings in committee were narrated in full, flanked by the amount of their nightly receipts.

“Nevertheless,” said one paper, “these receipts would be worse still if they had not struck Mdlle. Rachel’s name from the free list, which measure obliges her to take a box every evening, just for the sake of annoying them a bit.”

The cause of the Comedians was energetically taken up by the “advanced” papers, which maintained that they (the Comedians) ought to starve to death rather than desert their principles. Hence they had to be saved in spite of themselves, and that is probably why the Minister of the Interior wrote me one day the following letter:

“MY DEAR MONSIEUR HOUSSAYE,

“Your nomination decided upon a month ago is

* An allusion to Théophile Corret de la Tour d’Auvergne, surnamed “the First Grenadier of France,” by reason of his great acts of courage on the battle-field. Fell at Oberhausen (Bavaria) in 1800, at the age of forty-seven.—[Transl.]

signed at last, but will be published only to-morrow. Come and see me about six, in order to settle your 'entry on the scene.'

“ FERDINAND BARROT.”

The first words the Minister said when I came into his room were, “ Here is your nomination. The Prince signed it an hour ago. The Comedians know nothing about it. You are going to enter upon your campaign. Get out of it as best you can. You have full liberty of action. I do not wish to see you any more. You are absolute director until the day when you'll make a blunder; for be it known to you, man of wit, that man is not perfect.”

I gathered from this that if I was absolute director the Minister washed his hands of the whole thing, and that I should be left utterly by myself to confront the *tragédiennes* and Comedians—Cæsar and Pompey, Figaro and Basilio, the powers most to be feared.

We shook hands.

“ Good-bye,” said the Minister, “ we'll see how you set about it.”

I went straight to Rachel, who had written to me an hour previously:

“ Don't forget to come and dine with me, dear director. I have got some bad news for you. In spite of all I could do and say to the contrary you have been appointed.

“ RACHEL.”

“Do you know,” she asked, “how the thing was managed? The Minister kept on refusing because he warned the Prince that the Comedians were determined to close the theatre rather than open the door to a director, no matter whom. But last night during the Ministerial Council at the Elysée our ambassador slipped into the carriage of M. Ferdinand Barrot and of course caught him on his return. They drove back together to the ministry. Our friend pleaded so eloquently—for military eloquence is after all the best—that the Minister pledged him his word for to-day. Show me your papers, that I may know whether to cry victory, for I have done all this.”

Mdlle. Rachel recited aloud for her own amusement, “In the name of the French people, the President of the Republic, on the report of the Minister of the Interior, appoints M. Arsène Housaye Provisional Director of the Théâtre of the Republic.”

We were still at the period when the word “provisional” invested all the governmental decrees with a semblance of transition; “provisional”—everything was provisional.

“That’s all right,” said Mdlle. Rachel, “Napoleon and Barrot, two good signatures, to say nothing of the French people, who have been allowed to have a finger in the pie. I am of opinion that you may take me to the Théâtre Français to-night. I shall no longer be looked

It was getting dusk, a cold greyish dusk—I felt as if a shroud was being wrapped round me. The fire had gone out, and the only thing I could distinguish in the gathering darkness of the committee-room was the bust of Molière, the melancholy gravity of his features increased by the ambient shadows.

“Nevertheless,” I went on musing, as if speaking to Molière, “what could be more glorious to a man who loves the master-minds than to gild anew this their illustrious home; to give their works in a brilliant framework; to summon all the valiant intellects—Hugo, Dumas, Musset, Vigny, Balzac, Augier; to oppose the work of the living to the work of the deathless; to prove that France has not fallen from her high estate, and that her intellectual life breathes as freely as ever?”

The Molière in marble was a sceptic who vouchsafed not the least encouragement of those splendid ideas, but I went into the directorial sanctum with renewed determination.

CHAPTER III.

A GENTLEMAN of about fifty was writing at a mahogany desk in the austere-furnished director's room. "This, then, is the kingdom, I exclaimed sadly. The gentleman rose, bowed to me, and resumed his writing imperturbably. I failed to account for his presence. Why was he there? To whom was he writing?

"It is next week's repertory," he said, pushing his spectacles up to his forehead.

"Oh, indeed. And who makes out this repertory?"

"I do."

"I'd feel obliged, monsieur, by your giving me your card; here is mine."

"I am M. Sevestre." *

"Oh, I see—M. Sevestre! You are the director of the Montmartre Theatre, and you come here to write out your repertory?"

"No, monsieur, I am no longer director of the Montmartre Theatre; I am director of the Théâtre

* The name was ennobled afterwards. M. Edmond Sevestre died a hero's death before the walls of Paris.

